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TAGS: MARR MOPS PREL NATO AF FR
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN, FRANCE AND NATO: EVOLVING FRENCH
THINKING ON DEPLOYMENTS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, Reason 1
.4 B/D

¶1. (C) In a follow up to the widely-rumored, but not yet publicly announced, French decision to withdraw its Special Forces (SOF) contribution to OEF in Afghanistan, we inquired of MOD and MFA contacts as to France's commitment to ISAF and OEF. MFA Strategic Affairs Advisor in the Cabinet Francois Carrel-Billiard and MOD Strategic Affairs DAS-Equivalent director for NATO Col. Antoine Creux reiterated to us France's commitment to operations in Afghanistan, but also confirmed that the SOF deployment was no longer viewed as essential, since it no longer corresponds to its original anti-terrorism mission. In terms of the future, Creux added that France is studying seriously the request made by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld for France to reassign some SOF

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to train Afghan counterparts, and conveyed to Defense Minister Alliot-Marie during her October 19 meeting with Secdef in Washington. (Note: France has been training the Afghan Army.)

¶2. (C) Carrel-Billiard and Creux stated that France's engagement in Afghanistan is clear. It continues to honor its two-year commitment to ISAF's Kabul region, although troop levels can be expected to drop in 2007, when France turns over the command to Turkey. At that time, French forces would return to their pre-August 2006 levels, Creux noted. Additionally, to emphasize ongoing French support and commitment, Creux and Carrel-Billiard separately pointed to France's recent decision to extend the deployment of its three Mirage 2000 planes in Tajikistan. "Their deployment continues to be useful in support of OEF and ISAF operations," Creux observed.

¶3. (C) We reinforced NATO's request for France and others to send additional forces in support of operations in the south and elsewhere, as called by NATO commanders. Creux and Carrel-Billiard repeated France's response that its forces are stretched thin due to commitments in Lebanon, the Balkans and Africa. Creux further explained France's reluctance by noting that deployments to ISAF were not unconditional, but in accordance with the original NATO Oplan. He added that member countries made specific regional commitments to ISAF, in accordance with national guidelines. Changes in deployments need to be revisited at the political level and in national capitals -- he cited the example of the German Parliament and its restrictions on German forces.

¶4. (C) When we pressed further for a French redeployment, Creux admitted that, given the strain on its forces,

Afghanistan is no longer viewed as France's top priority. France will continue to participate in Afghanistan and to demonstrate solidarity, he stated, but its focus is on French commitments in Lebanon, Africa, and the Balkans. Each alliance member has to rationalize its commitments based on its capabilities, with the UK committed to Afghanistan, for instance, while France is concerned about the Balkan region, and must also take into account its other non-NATO deployments, Creux concluded.

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